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Letter dated 22 April 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 100, 108, 109 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bruno **Rodríguez Parrilla**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 22 April 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

Press conference by Foreign Minister of the República of Cuba, Felipe Pérez Roque on the mercenaries at the service of the empire who stood trial on April 3,4,5 and 7, 2003. Havana City, April 9, 2003

José L. Ponce (Presenter).- Good afternoon to all our colleagues. Welcome to this special presentation by Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque.

There are here 82 journalists from the international accredited press, representing 59 media from 22 countries, and the entire national press is represented as well.

Without further delay, I will leave you with Minister Felipe Pérez Roque, who will make a special presentation and then we will proceed to a round of questions and answers.

F.M. Felipe Pérez.– Good afternoon to all the foreign press correspondents accredited in our country and the national press.

We have convened this meeting to give you information on the trials of the last few days and their background, as well as commenting on some other issues of interest.

In the first place, I should like to make it clear that the government and people of Cuba have a very clear understanding that they are currently waging a hard struggle for their right to self-determination, for their right to independence.

The people and government of Cuba have not lost sight for a minute of the fact that what is at stake in Cuba is the future of our country as a nation and the full rights of every citizen of our country.

After more than 40 years of an ironclad economic, financial and commercial blockade, of aggressions, terrorist acts, more than 600 assassination attempts on the life of the Cuban President; after decades of incitement to subversion, illegal emigration, sabotage, activities by armed groups whose acts of terrorism against our country have been tolerated in the country where they originate; after all that history, which our people know only too well having suffered the loss of many lives and considerable material losses –the blockade alone has cost Cuba more than $70 billion USD– on top of all that, our people have had to contend with the obsession of U.S. governments to fabricate an opposition in Cuba, to fabricate an organized dissidence in Cuba, to foment in Cuba the emergence or strengthening of groups responding to their interests, with an evidently annexationist vision, those who would be responsible some day for propitiating Cuba's annexation to the United States, in the supposed scenario of the defeat of the Cuban Revolution. That has been its obsession and the purpose of the laws, the funding, the incitement and the role of the special services.

One plan after another has foundered against the unity of our people, against the moral authority of the Cuban Revolution, against the unquestionable fact that the overwhelming majority of the Cuban people support and defend the Revolution, against the unquestionable historical moral leadership of the Cuban Revolution. They have come up against all of that, but they have not overcome that resistance, which has elicited international admiration.

I must give this background information, because recent events in Cuba cannot be examined without taking into account that there is still this historical dispute with Cuba over its right to independence and the struggle of the Cuban people to preserve that independence vis à vis a historical ambition and concrete plans for Cuba's annexation to the United States. It is that which is at stake in Cuba today. Thus, in analyzing the Cuban reality and what is occurring in Cuba today, that element should be kept in mind.

Cuba is well aware that international law is on its side. The United Nations Charter recognizes the right of Cuba to choose its own political system, it recognizes respect for the principle of equality among states and it recognizes the right of peoples to self-determination. Thus, the blockade, the aggressive actions and pressures on Cuba are attempts at violating our people's right to exercise its self-determination, create its institutions, and found its political and economic system of its own free will.

That is what is at stake in Cuba today, that is, if a small country, in the vicinity of a great superpower, can be an independent country, can be a country that follows its own path.

International covenants on human rights approved by the United Nations and much referred to in these days, state, and I quote: "That all peoples have the right to self-determination", and as Cubans, we have given ourselves that right. We have approved a constitution, we have amended it, we have laws, we have institutions, we have more than 2,000 organizations whish are part of our civil society --including non-governmental organizations and workers leagues– and we have our own system, our institutions, and we have chosen our own way and we demand that it is respected. That is what is at stake here, that is, whether we can or cannot do things our own way and exercise that right.

The Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS), from which as it is known Cuba was expelled due to pressure from the US government --an issue on which we have repeatedly made our opinion clear-- the Charter of the OAS, to which the United States does belong and in which it exercises its full might, reads: "All states have the right to choose, without external interference, their political, economic and social system, and to organize it in the form that is most convenient for them, and have the duty not to interfere in the affairs of other states."

That is laid down in the OAS Charter, which is supposedly the cornerstone of the Organization of the Americas, and thus we are fighting in Cuba for that right, against all the pressure and against the intensified hostility of a new government in the United States that, in the exercise of its unilateral power in the world, has increased its rhetoric and hostility toward Cuba to unexpected levels.

So, that is what is at stake in Cuba today. We find it important that these elements are taken into account as the backdrop of everything we are going to explain here this afternoon.

It is a fact that there have been more than 40 years of blockade, of aggression, of armed invasions; it is a fact that illegal emigration from Cuba has been incited; it is a fact that a policy has been pursued by 10 successive U.S. administrations that Cuba has had to confront and which it has had to survive. But with the advent of the administration headed by President Bush, jr. in the United States, hostility towards Cuba has dramatically increased.

In conjunction with the debt of gratitude that President Bush owed the extremist groups in Miami that backed his electoral campaign and played a key role in his election, the presence of more than 20 Cubans from extremist groups in Miami in key positions in the U.S. government and the decision to give central responsibility for Latin American Affairs, and thus

for Cuba, in the State Department to Mr. Otto Reich, have open the way for a new stage of growing hostilities towards Cuba.

I should clearly say that we do not blame the American people for this situation. We have feelings of friendship and respect for the people of the United States, and we have given proof of that.

We do not blame the majority of Cubans who live in the United States, either, the ones we do not call "the mafia;" we refer to them as the Cuban community resident there, whose right to relations with their families and to visit Cuba we also respect and defend, we do not blame them. We do not blame wide sectors of U.S. society, its academics, its business sector, who understand the need for a change in policy towards Cuba and the normalization of relations. We blame for this situation the extremist Miami groups, which are a minority, and the sectors within the Administration that have committed themselves to a policy of hostility towards Cuba.

We do not even blame the majority of the House and the Senate, whose members have given proof in recent years of their will, their decision, their aspiration for the normalization of relations between the two countries, for the promotion of trade, for the sale of food and medicines, for U.S. citizens' right to travel to Cuba, for the elimination of the anachronistic prohibitions currently preventing them from traveling to Cuba.

Now, is that the road that the majority of U.S. society, according to surveys, data, and publications want it to be followed today? No. Another road in relation to Cuba has been followed, a road that has led to a reinforcement of the blockade, a strengthening of the blockade measures –later we shall see some of those recent decisions– a road of greater incitement than ever to illegal emigration, a greater tolerance of it.

I will simply say that in the last seven months there have been seven hijackings of Cuban air and sea crafts, encouraged by tolerance, by the indiscriminate application of the Cuban Adjustment Act, by the practice of receiving people who use terrorism and violence to get there, who use firearms, something that is penalized in international conventions to which the United States is a party; and the terrorist hijackers involved in four of those cases remain at liberty, and there is no news of any legal proceedings being taken against them –the first four of those seven cases, from August of last year to date.

In four cases, the hijackers that committed acts of terrorism are freely walking the streets; that is what has happened. There are people living freely in Miami who murdered to divert vessels or planes to the United States, and there has been an increase in all of that. I will return to this point later.

The 1200 weekly hours of radio broadcasts against Cuba are receiving more funds than ever. The U.S. Interests Section in Havana has been instructed to practically set up there the headquarters of internal subversion in Cuba, with the highest profile of a head of this section in its 25 years of functioning, in open violation of the laws governing diplomatic conduct, by openly interfering in Cuba's internal affairs, in a tone and behavior totally inappropriate for a diplomat.

The U.S. Interests Section's diplomatic pouch is being increasingly used to bring funds and the means for the exercise of counterrevolutionary acts in Cuba to groups created and funded by the U.S. government. To sum up, we have a situation where there has been an increase in subversive actions, disrespect for Cuban laws, and open defiance of Cuba's legal institutions, which all diplomatic representations should respect in their work in our country.

To give you an example of how Mr. James Cason anticipated his work in Cuba as head of the US Interests Section in Havana, I will make available to you a brief excerpt of an interview he gave to Miami television in December, so that you can hear in his own words what we are talking about.

(Video showed)

Journalist.- ...your new position as head of the US Interests Section in Havana, now given that your are moving about, you have met with ordinary Cubans and with dissidents in Cuba. Have you already met with leaders of the anti-Castro organizations in exile as well?

James Cason.- Yes, two or three times. Every time I go to Miami, I want to meet and have met with all the groups, the Cuban-American National Foundation, the Council for the Freedom of Cuba, independent groups and all the groups here, because I want to explain what I have seen in Cuba, what is happening and to hear their points of view on what we are doing, to see if there is something we should do that we are not doing. It is a very amiable dialogue and one of my messages is that the important thing in Cuba is that there is an opposition; they are isolated, harassed, but they are persisting and have a lot of courage, and the important thing is that they meet, come together and concentrate on the essentials, on the rights that they do not have and on the liberties that they should have; in other words, not to focus on personalities, on ideological differences; the important thing is that the opposition has to gain ground, because the day is going to come when there is a transition. There is a transition now, but there is going to be a new Cuba one day, and they have to take their part in forming and deciding the future of Cuba. So, they must win their space, begin to discuss what has to be done differently to change Cuba; so, it is important that they focus on the important things, not the non-essential ones.

Journalist.- Of the meetings that you have had with the dissidents –I don't know if you want to go into this type of detail– but, where do you see that the dissident movement is perhaps not going in a positive direction? What is your message to the dissidents? I would like to ask you, if you allow me to, for a message to anti-Castro groups in Miami. Which is your message to the dissidents in Cuba, what would you like to tell them base on what you have already seen?

James Cason.- Well, first that the future of Cuba... as US citizens we are not going to decide the future of Cuba, it's going to be the Cubans, outside and within Cuba. From my point of view,... my advice is to focus on the essential, what are the important factors? Not to become divided, to meet and try to agree or reach an agreement on 10 points; for example, points on which all of them agree, and not talk about issues on which they are not in agreement; because in a democracy everyone has differences, there are actions, but the important thing is that that is a military dictatorship where if people do not meet, they are not going to have much chance of prospering. So, they should concentrate on the essentials and look for points of agreement, not differences.

Journalist.- O.K., now I'm moving on to the theme of the dissidence movement. One of your priorities is also to help that movement in Cuba. How are you trying to help the Castro opposition?

James Cason.- Well, as I said before, by offering information, moral and spiritual support, that they are not alone, that the world knows what is going on inside Cuba. One manifestation of that is the fact that many of the leaders, like Osvaldo Payá, Vladimiro Roca, Marta Beatriz Roque, have received European human rights awards and from other parts of

the world, so the world knows what is going on in Cuba, and we are there to tell them about that reality and help them as much as possible.

We're not giving them anything, it is not what Castro says, that we are financing the opposition; the opposition is insisting on the fact that the system has failed and we are there to offer them the support of the American people and of the rest of the democratic world in what they are doing, which is advocating having the basic human rights that Cuba signed in the Declaration of Human Rights, in the Universal declarations, and has not fulfilled in all these years.

Felipe Pérez. - This is Mr. Cason in December. As you can see his explicit job is to unify the groups, help them to draw up a ten-point program.

Mr. Cason, as we can see, came to Cuba with the plan of creating a single party of dissidents in Cuba. I don't know, then, why it bothers him so much that we Cuban revolutionaries have a single party to defend the Revolution, since that is what he has tried to foster with the so-called "dissidents".

His instructions concerning these groups were to iron out their internal differences, the internecine "fights" over who shall play the leading role or over money, and to try to create a unified group, with money.

I am amazed that he doesn't talk about the prizes awarded in the United States, because the International Republican Institute, one of the groups that has received money from the United States, that received as much as $1,674,462 in 2002, and what for? To help create the bases of international support to provide the activists in Cuba with material, moral and ideological support, even giving them awards and international recognition. And we know how this institution and others in the United States have been involved in the business of giving prizes and for that reason they have been giving more and more money every year, organizing trips, awards, tours. We have information on all of that.

I want to highlight to you the idea that Mr. Cason marks a time when the anti-Cuban policy, the policy of subversion against Cuba is become fiercer, overt, gloves off.

Here he says: "I meet whenever I can with the Cuban-American National Foundation", the people who financed the wave of terrorists attacks on hotels in Cuba which caused the death of an Italian tourist and injuries to dozens of tourists and Cuban workers.

"I meet with them whenever I can", with the Council for the Freedom of Cuba which is the paramilitary wing of the old Cuban American National Foundation; Martín Pérez, head of the Foundation's paramilitary apparatus, the organizer of many plans to assassinate the head of the Cuban state, President Fidel Castro, at international events; people involved in organizing and financing the attempt to put 40 kilograms of C-4 explosive in the Ibero-American Summit in Panama to assassinate the President of Cuba.

So "I meet with them whenever I can to give them information, to compare notes; I give them hope that the time is near when they and the groups inside which we support can finally ensure that people enjoy their human rights" all those individuals, Batista supporters most of them, implicated in the repression and murder of 20,000 Cubans during the Batista dictatorship.

We are very well aware why Mr. Cason has come here, what orders he brings, what his motives are and what affiliations he has. Therefore, it is our duty and our right to defend our country's independence using the legal structure in our country strictly within respect for our laws, for our moral values and our sense of life and of the convictions that guide us.

Now, that interview took place in December. What has happened between then and now? On February 27, 2003, Adolfo Franco, a Cuban, one of more than twenty holding positions in the government, an administrator who looks after Latin America and the Caribbean in USAID, the United States Agency for International Development, a U.S. government agency, said before a House of Representative Foreign Affairs Subcommittee that the U.S. Agency for International Development has invested more than $20 million, $22 million to be exact, since 1997 to put the Helms-Burton Act into effect in Cuba.

He also said that one of the things done to comply with this act has been to send materials, propaganda, to deliver more than 7,000 radio tuned to receive Radio Marti, among other things.

The USAID itself has said that these $22 million are just a tiny part of the funds channeled to Cuba, a tiny part! because most of the money for subversion does not go through USAID. The Helms-Burton Act has paragraph 109 which directs the government to distribute money for subversion in Cuba through USAID and it has paragraph 115 which favors giving the money through secret channels, the special services' channels. USAID itself says that the amount they give is the smallest part and, according to Franco, it has been $22 million since 1997.

On February 28, the Five Cuban Heroes unjustly imprisoned in the United States when they were helping the fight against terrorism, are once again send to the punishment cells from where they are not allowed out until April 2.

On March 24, the Office of Foreign Assets Control —the U.S. government office which keeps an eye open to see that the blockade is abided by— issues new regulations which make the blockade even tighter: travel by Americans to Cuba is limited even more; the small licenses that had been issued so that students could come to Cuba, for intellectuals and suchlike, have been restricted to such a point that they are virtually eliminated; educational exchanges are eliminated, no only who can come here has been restricted in an arbitrary manner but also who can go there. Visas are virtually denied out of hand to young people, students, Cuban intellectuals, athletes, and scientists to attend events in the United States to which they have been invited. Travel to Cuba on trips to supply the groups in their job of internal subversion has been expedited. Americans are forbidden to attend seminars and conferences in Cuba organized by Cuban institutions. That is to say that on March 24, a new tightening of the blockade took place, which takes the measure against Cuba envisaged by the blockade to schizophrenic levels.

On March 26, the Secretary of State Mr. Colin Powell appears before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee and announces that the budget he is presenting includes $26,900,000 for anti-Cuban broadcasts on Radio and Television "Marti"; this is added to the twenty something millions we already mentioned and is a violation of international legality, of the International Telecommunications Union's regulations, and acknowledges that they finance a radio station which violates our radio electronic space with more than 1,200 broadcast hours to Cuba every week encouraging internal subversion, sabotage plans, encouraging desertion, illegal emigration, that is what that radio and television station spend their time doing, spreading lies and false stories about Cuba.

On March 31, the State Department publishes its report on human rights in the world, which, as we know, discusses the whole world except for the United States itself and devotes pages of lies and slanders to Cuba which are then used as the basis for submitting the

resolution against Cuba, which the United States sponsors and organizes, in the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

This year the resolution will be voted on, on April 16. The United States, because of its inability and lack of credibility to submit it, especially since it has been out of the Commission for a year as the international community felt that it did not meet the requirements for being a member of the commission, and after getting back on [the commission] thanks to Spain and Italy that agreed to withdraw their candidacies so that the United States could be elected without voting since it set the condition of not having to go to a vote because it feared losing —because voting in the election is secret and they are afraid of secret ballots whereas we aim for them— so it is back, but it feels afraid to submit the resolution against Cuba.

Other countries that previously rendered them this service are not willing to do it anymore. So now the United States has sought to have the governments of Peru and Costa Rica join with the government of Uruguay, who did it last year. They have submitted an almost innocuous text which says practically nothing but meets the American goal of ensuring that the subject is kept before the Commission on Human Rights so they can justify keeping the blockade against Cuba by the censure of Cuba in Geneva.

On April 2, the Undersecretary of state for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Curtis Strubble said "the USAID will invest $7 million from the fund for economic support in Cuba this year". Note how money is flowing into Cuba. Here we have seen Mr. Cason saying that the United States really does not provide financing. In my view, Mr. Cason does not read Congress's minutes, they don't tell him what his bosses say because the Undersecretary of State says that they have allocated $7 million this year; the Administrator for Latin America says that they have allotted $22 million, USAID alone. Mr. Cason doesn't want to know about these things but anyway I shall tell you later on how the money gets here and what is the government's role and I will show you here the paychecks and the payrolls that we have in our possession.

On April 6, the Sun Sentinel, a Florida newspaper has an article telling how the counterrevolutionary organization Commandos F-4, a violent terrorist group tied to sabotage plans, to armed raids into Cuba are training with heavy arms —it doesn't say with handguns and knives— it says: "Training is with heavy arms to carry out armed actions against Cuba and for a possible armed invasion of that country."

The Sun Sentinel calls the terrorist organization paramilitary and prints statements by the head of this organization that openly declares their intention of eliminate the Cuban President by military force and terrorist methods. They train, they have a camp over there, located in south Florida and they feel inspired in this new time in relation to increase their violent terrorist activities against Cuba.

This is what has been happening, especially in the last few months, since the U.S. government decided to turn up the heat on our country.

Now, what has Cuba done during this time, what have we done, aware that the majority of the U.S. people does not have a hostile view of Cuba; aware that there is a growing current of friendship of sympathy towards Cuba in the US; knowing that the overwhelming majority of the American people supported the return of the little Cuban boy whom they tried to kidnap in Florida; motivated, as well, by genuine feelings of respect of friendship toward the people of the United States?

While all of this was going on, we, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, which Cuba condemned offering its sympathies to the American people, rejecting the practice of terrorism, offering our air space, our airports, offering medical assistance, offering Cuban institutions to provide help for the victims of the attack, after we had offered to the US medicine to fight against anthrax in the United States, we offered to produce 100 million tablets for them, free of charge, but received virtually no reply. We expressed our willingness to provide medical equipment developed in Cuba, scientific equipment that, in a time of terror in the United States, could help with research to fight against anthrax.

On 29 November 2001, we sent a note to the Head of the US Interest Section in Havana which officially proposed the draft agreements for both countries to co-operate in matters concerning the fight against drug-trafficking, the fight against terrorism, co-operation to eliminate the smuggling of persons, the illegal immigration which we have submitted on previous occasions and which have been reiterated afterwards, receiving a negative reply.

Why is the U.S. government not interested in co-operating with Cuba in matters concerning drug trafficking, the fight against illegal emigration, boat and plane hijacking, people smuggling and the fight against terrorism? Why isn't it interested? These are subjects of interest to the U.S. society.

On December 20, 2001 we passed our law against acts of terrorism in which we set penalties for anyone using Cuban territory even to organize or finance acts [of terrorism] against other countries including the United States.

When the news about the Nile virus broke out we made an offer to the U.S. government to co-operate in scientific research. While this was going on what was going on over there? Cuba was falsely and unjustly accused on being a country that sponsors terrorism, of being a country with a program to develop biological and chemical weapons that we had to prove wrong when the time came. They tried to boycott President Carter's visit to Cuba by making those accusation to coincide with his visit to our country.

We have, nevertheless, kept on with our fight against terrorism, we have given drug traffickers tough sentences, we have struggled to ensure that drugs don't travel close to Cuba so that Cuban territory is not used to ship drugs to the United States.

The U.S. people must have plenty of examples of the feelings of respect for Cuba, proved by the hundreds of US farmers who have come to Cuba, who have defended their rights. And it was while they were defending their rights that the purchase of more than one million tons of food was purchased from the United States, worth almost $250 million, something significant for U.S. farmers.

In other words, while all this was occurring and Cuba was making gestures of good will, the response was all this policy of harassment and provocation against Cuba.

Now well, I should give a brief timetable of the days leading up to the criminal trials, which we shall explain later.

On February 24 this year, the head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, Mr. Cason, in a meeting organized by him with a group of those mercenaries who, organized and financed by the U.S. government cooperate with the power that attacks their country, at that meeting Mr. Cason made unheard of statements, words never before spoken by any diplomat in any part of the world, offensive words against the government and people of Cuba, words that infringe the basic rules on how diplomats should behave, interfering words, words aimed at provoking the Cuban government and people. That was February 24.

On March 6, the President of the Cuban Council of State, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, in his remarks to the National Assembly gave due response to these provocations, called these words a shameless and defiant provocation and suggested that perhaps the numerous U.S. intelligence service officers who work in the USIS could explain to Mr Cason that Cuba could easily do without the U.S. Interest Section in Havana; a warning, a clear message that he should stop his provocations, should temper his behavior, which is becoming truly intolerable for the authorities and the public opinion in Cuba.

On March 7, the U.S. State Department confirmed that the five Cubans held political prisoner in U.S. jails had been in the punishment cells for nine days.

On March 10, we delivered a diplomatic note to Mr. Cason, Note 365 in which we replied to the statements he had made on February 24, we asked him once again to cease his openly provocative actions, his interference with Cuba and we let him know about decisions we had taken concerning his subversive movements in our country which violate Cuban law. It seemed to be our final warning, our final effort at persuading Mr. Carson about his irresponsible and openly provocative behavior.

On March 12, that is, two days after our note, seemingly as a response to our appeal, to our diplomatic note, Mr. Cason organized a new conspiratorial meeting in his own residence, the place where he lives, setting yet another record, now he was not only offering his offices but also his house.

On March 14, two days later, he again organized another meeting --it was so quickly organized that we perceived an obvious decision to reach a confrontational stage with Cuban authorities— it began at 10:00 in the morning, ended at 5:00 in the afternoon.

We have been patient. I am telling the whole story to provide evidence that we have been patient, that we have been tolerant. But, in fact, Mr. Cason's latest decision to turn the U.S. Interests Section in Havana and his residence into a sort of headquarters of subversion against Cuba, is sending a message to all these mercenaries which is that of believing that they can count on impunity, that they are protected by a powerful ally who encourages, finances, organizes, and directs them and having created this situation, Mr. Cason implementing his government's aggressive policy against Cuba at unsuspected levels has compelled us to apply our law, and these trials must be understood as Cuba's behavior when no other option remained given the path of confrontation and provocation that the U.S. government has chosen to pursue in its relations with Cuba and in which the Head of its diplomatic mission in Havana has played a leading role.

Our patience was no longer justified; our tolerance was no longer justified. Things had reached an untenable point for our country which lives under aggression, harassment and blockade and which has laws to defend itself and has made sovereign use of its laws to protect its sovereignty, to punish those who co-operate with the power that tries to subvert order in the country and tries to crush and deprive Cubans of the right to enjoy independence and self- determination.

Mr Cason and his irresponsible behavior exhausted our patience. He is the main responsible for what has happened.

Therefore, after all this, on March 18, the decision was taken to arrest a group of the mercenaries who had been at the meetings on December 24, March 12 and 14. Thirty-two mercenaries were arrested that day.

On the following day, March 19, another 33 mercenaries were arrested. They had, and have, been involved and received money and given distorted information so the Helms-

Burton Act could be implemented, so that the blockade could be implemented. They have contributed to the U.S. policy of condemning Cuba in Geneva to legitimize the blockade, to give a cloak of respectability to the blockade that is rejected by the international community.

On the night of March 19, a DC-3 was hijacked the result of years of tolerating, of encouraging plane hijackings, of welcoming those who commit violent acts to emigrate illegally to the United States as heroes.

And I really want to stress this, because, when I say that it was the 18 and 19 of March I am underlining that this decision was taken and these arrests took place before the war in Iraq began and before the two planes and the ferry were hijacked. The decision was taken before and the arrests took place as a result of the unbearable situation we had been placed in by Mr. Cason's provocations and irresponsible behavior.

Now, with the DC-3 hijacked, the hijackers in the United States, the plane confiscated, the news leaked to the press that the authorities were willing to grant the hijackers bail —which finally, it seems, is not going to happen but it was leaked to the press and where there's smoke there's fire— all this created new encouragement, as we warned, and again on March 31, the AN-24 was hijacked. On April 2 the ferry was hijacked. Curiously, with the ferry hijacking there was a change in the behavior pattern that U.S. authorities had showed until that time. Because in compliance with the Migratory Agreements they intercepted at sea all the small craft that were trying to reach the United States, they stopped the boats and were committed to returning those who were trying to reach the United States illegally. They didn't return all of them, they took between 10% and 12% of those intercepted to the United States, under one pretext or another, but still they did return about 90%.

On the day of the hijacked ferry they said that they were not willing to act in this case as they had always done and so we took action and solved the problem.

In other words, there has been a wave of plane hijackings, an attempt to use illegal emigration to destabilize the country, to create a situation in Cuba that was really complex. Then, on April 3 the trials began.

Now that I have spoken of the immigration issue I want to add a piece of information that I think is important for what I am about to say. I want to say that we believe that the increase in hijackings —I already said there were seven hijackings in seven months using firearms, knives, violence against passengers, grenades-- our opinion is that these hijackings, these numerous plans for hijackings, for illegal emigration to the United States are actually part of a deliberate plan to encourage illegal departures from Cuba, to encourage people to commit acts of terrorism on boats, and on planes that fly to and from Cuba, to encourage the hijacking of Cuban boats and of Cuban planes, to create the conditions which will allow them to tear up the immigration agreement.

We believe there is a deliberate plan whose final goal is to tear up the immigration agreements which have been working between the two countries for almost a decade and to realize the dream of the groups of Cuban-born extremists, of the Cuban-born terrorist mob living in Florida that have always opposed these agreements and put continual pressure on the U.S. government to break up these agreements.

It is worth now casting a brief look at the text and commitments in this agreement. This is the joint communiqué of September 9, 1994, signed by both governments and it reads, "migrants rescued at sea attempting to enter the United States will not be permitted to enter the United States." It goes on to say that "both countries pledged their cooperation to take

prompt and effective action to prevent the transport of persons to the U.S. illegally," this is signed; it also says that "the two governments will take effective measures in every way they possibly can to oppose and prevent the use of violence by any persons seeking to reach, or who arrive in, the United States from Cuba by forcible diversions of aircraft and vessels." This is the commitment entered by the United States Government. It also says that "the United States ensure that total legal migration to the United States from Cuba will be a minimum of 20, 000 Cubans each year."

I will dwell here on this table I am showing: the U.S. government's commitment is to give visas to a minimum of 20,000 Cubans a year so they can emigrate. This does not include immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, therefore, not including that, a minimum of 20,000 should emigrate.

This table shows the true situation five months into the ninth year of the agreement. Each year of the agreement begins on October 1.

Between October 1 and February 28, in these first five months of the agreement in the year we are now in during which the United States should grant no less than 20,000 visas, with five months gone, they have issued 505 visas. Last year there were 7,237, in 2001 there were more than 8,300, in 2000, 10,860 and in 1999 back then, five months into the year, almost 11,600 Cubans had received their visas and were emigrating to the United States.

What does this abrupt reduction in issued visas mean in overt violation of the Immigration Agreement? Why is the U.S. government not meeting its commitment? Why, after five months have gone by are we not even close to 10,000 Cubans with visas and they have issued hardly 2.5% of the visas agreed to?

Last year there was already a violation; in 2002 they did not issue 20,000 visas. They were short by 2,000 visas since they granted just over 18,000 visas. That was a breach of the agreement last year, which ended on September 30.

Then, from October 1 until now, look at the curve (he points to the graph). What are we dealing with? We are dealing with a deliberate plan to make those who want to emigrate lose hope, so that they have no alternative but illegal emigration. Why don't they meet their obligations? Why has the Interests Section, with the extensive consular apparatus they have working in Havana, with all their facilities, given out barely 505 visas? It's the same in March, six months into the year.

So, at the present pace there will be a flagrant violation of the Immigration Agreement that commits the U.S. government to hand out at least 20,000 visas. We are witnessing the implementation of a premeditated plan to encourage illegal emigration, to leave those who want to emigrate from Cuba no other option than to hijack boats, planes. What we want is that migration takes place in a legal and orderly fashion.

There are people who want to tear up the immigration agreements. There is a list of people we know quite well who don't want any immigration agreements, who want to create an incident between Cuba and the United States, who are asking the United States to use aggression against Cuba.

Therefore, I think that this is the right opportunity to warn about this new provocation and confrontation scenario.

On May 2, 1995 both governments issued a joint declaration, which was annexed to the previous communiqué, and reads:

"From this moment on Cuban migrants who are intercepted at sea by the United States will be returned to Cuba.

"Both parties reaffirm their joint commitment to take measures to prevent dangerous exits from Cuba which could mean a risk of loss of human life and both commit themselves to opposing those acts of violence associated with illegal migration".

This is the agreement in force between our countries and we see how they dangerously breach the Immigration Agreement and issue a really minimum amount of visas to migrate legally from Cuba.

Now, I will offer you some information about the criminal trials, having looked at the background and explained their causes and the conditions that have brought us to this point.

Twenty-nine trials have been held in Cuba, in just about every province in the country. Charges were pressed against 75 people, 74 of them men, and the courts have handed down appropriate sentences of between 6 and 28 years in jail. Therefore, it is not true that there have been death sentences. It is not true that in these cases life sentences have been handed down, which the law allows for and the behavior of some of the defendants merit. Actually, even longer sentences than they were given are provided for their crimes in most legal systems around the world.

The criminal trials were arraigned on an expedite basis as per Law No. 5 of 1977, the Law of Criminal Procedure. And here I want to make a side comment.

A summary trial is an institution that is not new and is far from being a Cuban invention and something only used in Cuba, far from it. It is in the body of law of more than 100 countries, including the United States and was, in fact, brought to Cuba by the Spanish colonial government. Summary trials did not arise in Cuba in the Revolution; they date back to the 1888 Law of Criminal Prosecution so that it was the Spanish colonizers who brought this to Cuba, the Spanish colonial government. The Law of Criminal Prosecution of 1888 was in effect in Cuba as the Law of Criminal Procedure until 1973 when new regulations were adopted, but they took a lot from that law. Just as the present Cuban Commercial Code is still the Spanish Code from colonial times. And the interventionist U.S. military government from 1900 to 1902 used summary trials. So, we have inherited this institution, which is also used universally.

A summary trial means that the President of the Supreme Court is empowered to shorten the time for holding a trial, but under no circumstances does it mean a limitation of guarantees. Therefore, I strongly reject the idea that a summary trial is a trial without guarantees or that a summary trial is an institution invented by Cuba.

Summary trials also existed in the pseudo-republic, under Machado and Batista's bloody dictatorships, which U.S. governments supported and financed giving them military and political support, although they were not often used or they were used but they were not the only measures because they resorted to more expeditious solutions such as murder, disappearance and crime against their opponents.

In Latin America the United States backed military dictatorship that disappeared and murdered hundreds of thousands of people. They too used more expeditious procedures such as murder and disappearance, which the Revolution cannot be accused of. No one can come up with, nor will ever be able to come up with the name of a missing person in Cuba, the name of a murdered person, or of someone arrested in the early hours of morning with a hood placed on his or her head who was never seen again. However, there are hundreds of thousands of cases on those lists of missing people in Latin America that have yet to be resolved. No one can accuse Cuba of any such thing! Just as it cannot be accused of having the new institutions created by U.S. legislation such as the Secret Military Courts.

Therefore, I maintain that there has been absolute respect for due process and that all defendants have had their full guarantees respected in accordance with Cuban law and with the principles generally recognized and accepted throughout the world.

I will be quoting them in the six arguments I will put forward.

First, all of the defendants knew of the charges brought against them and had the opportunity to contest them before the trial began. They could also set forth anything they considered relevant. It is not true that they only learned of the charges during the trial. They were informed in advance and just like any other defendant in Cuba they had the opportunity to give their views on the charges.

Secondly, all of the defendants exercised their right to have legal counsel, a defence lawyer who, according to Cuban law, can be either retained by the defendant or, if he or she fails to do so, appointed by the court as assigned counsel.

I will make clear that 54 defence lawyers took part in the 29 trials; some lawyers represented more than one defendant.

Fifty-four took part, of which the defendants and their families appointed 44. I reject the notion that some of the defendants were not properly defended in their trial; that is untrue. Those who say this are lying. Of the 54 lawyers, the defendants retained 44, that is, 80% and the courts appointed 10.

Thirdly, all of the defendants exercised their right to be heard by previously established courts. No special ad hoc tribunal was set up to try them. They did not go before a military court set up in an expeditious way; that is not true. They were brought before previously established provincial courts, as our law provides for, and judges appointed who were already there and working in those courts. No judges were appointed on any especial basis nor courts specifically set up; that is untrue.

Therefore, all of them, each and every one of them, exercised their right to be heard in public hearings by courts and judges that already existed. Oral proceedings were held with the defendants where they exercised their right to speak, where they answered questions from the defence and the prosecution, where witnesses were called, experts were called, where the defence lawyers examined the witnesses, including the experts. There were oral hearings because our law does not allow a court to make a decision without a hearing, as it is the case with the U.S. and other legal systems where the defendants can plead guilty or cut a deal, and sentence can be passed without a trial.

Here in Cuba a hearing is required and hearings were held. In other words, nobody was judged on paper or without being given the chance to express his opinion and make his statements and those of his lawyers.

The oral hearings were open to the public. I reject the notion of secret trials. On average, about 100 people per trial attended the hearings. Almost 3,000 people attended all of the hearings, mostly family members, witnesses and expert witnesses —hundreds of witnesses and expert witnesses— and on average about 100 people almost 3,000 at the 29 trials. Therefore, I reject the notion of the defendants brought to trial in a place with no guarantees and with nobody in attendance; that information is false.

I must now here make clear the following: it has been said, "Foreign diplomats in Havana were not present at the trials." Some foreign diplomats, I should say from a small number of countries, were especially interested in these matters, I don't know why. And this has been used as an example of the lack of guarantees.

Who can say that a foreign diplomat has any right to attend a trial if someone from his country is not being tried? If there had been a citizen from his country, the trial would have been held without the presence of a diplomatic representative. That is how things works in Cuba in those cases where foreigners must stand trial because they have committed a crime in our country, drug trafficking, crimes of terrorism and other crimes. There is always diplomatic and consular access and representation from the defendants' country of origin.

Why should a foreign diplomat attend a trial where Cubans are being tried by a Cuban court, with Cuban accusers, Cuban defence attorneys and Cuban relatives? What monitoring job does he or she have to do there? If they want any information they can address the Foreign Ministry and we shall decide what information we offer. We do not have to grant a special right that we are not granted. The courts are empowered to decide who can and who cannot attend.

I want to make it clear that we have not ignored any prerogative of some foreign diplomats in Havana. There is simply no reason for foreign diplomats to attend a trial unless one of their nationals is on trial.

The courts decided that they would not be open to the press, that is their prerogative and we respect it. They decided for security and organizational reasons and to avoid any incidents to limit access of hundreds of thousands and millions of revolutionaries who, angry at the unpatriotic and mercenary attitude of those individuals would have liked to attend those trials but couldn't go either. But those trials were held with all guarantees for the physical and moral integrity of the accused and with due order and respect for their relatives and for all involved.

I stress that these were oral, public and adversary proceedings, that is a principle of law, which allows for the defence to present opposing views. Therefore, I strongly reject the idea of a trial in which these rights were not guaranteed.

Fourth, all of the defendants and their defence lawyers exercised their right to introduce evidence in their favor, which was examined the same as that produced by the police investigation, which was introduced by the prosecution. They exercised their right to call their witnesses. The defence lawyers called 28 witnesses who had not been previously called by the prosecution, of whom 22, the overwhelming majority were authorized on the spot by the courts to act as witnesses.

All of the defence lawyers had prior access to the list of charges. What happened to the defence lawyers of the five Cubans unjustly sentenced in Miami did not happen here, that still today, all this time after the trial, they have not been given access to 80% of the documents submitted by the prosecution because the U.S. government has declared them to be secret. That did not happen here.

What happened to the five Cubans in Miami who were not able to read the charges against them in order to prepare their defence did not happen here. That did not happen nor did the defence lawyers have to argue their cases without having seen 80% of the prosecution's charges. That was not the case here.

Neither have any of those defendants in Cuba been put into solitary confinement to prevent them from preparing for the trial.

Fifth, all have the right, and they were notified of this during the trial, to appeal their sentences in a court higher than the one, which handed down their sentences, in this case to the Supreme Court. This is a right they have which the Cuban law respects scrupulously.

And sixth; I said I was going to cite six arguments. There has been the most transparent and scrupulous respect for the physical safety, for the physical and moral integrity of each of the defendants at every stage of the trial. There is not here the slightest evidence or the slightest suspicion of coercion, pressure, threats or blackmail. We cannot be accused of any of that because we have morale, because we believe in moral values and that is what has allowed us to get this far, and our people know that.

Now on this subject I'm going to show you the opinion offered, on this matter of guarantees, by one of the defendants in a trial yesterday.
(A video is shown)
Presiding Judge: ... to make a statement or refrain from doing so, Do you want to make a statement?
Defendant: Yes, I want to make a statement.
Presiding Judge: Freely?
Defendant: Freely.
Presiding Judge: You can proceed now.
Defendant: I suggest you ask me questions, like you did to Miguel, that the court asks me questions.
Presiding Judge: You said you wanted to do it freely, that is, without questions. Well, then I will say the same thing that if there is any question that you do not wish to answer you should tell the members of the court that is your right.
Defendant.- I want to attest to here, before this court, the proper treatment that we have been given by the State Security authorities in the investigation department. We have been treated fairly, we have not been harassed, and we have not been mistreated at any time.

We must say that the officials, the high command of Villamarista and all of the staff there, including the guards and the service staff, have treated us very well, or at least me personally. I want to say this because, well, I have not been in contact with the other defendants. But, I want to express my gratitude for this proper treatment, and for the fact that we have been offered very good medical care three times a day, and in the case of any kind of pain, any kind of health problem, the doctors have come to our cells, they have been there right with us, if someone had high blood pressure, or needed to take medication at a certain time, or for any kind of pain, a toothache, anything. The investigation department has taken care of us at all times.

They have allowed visits from our families, we have been given 15, 20, 25 minutes to see our families, and we appreciate this, or at least I appreciate this. I wanted to say that. The visits with our families have been open, in front of an investigator, but still, they have been open, we have been allowed to talk freely. And we have also had ample contact with our defense lawyers, they have given us all the time in the world to speak with them.

Well, I want to make it clear here that any false rumors there may be about the conduct of the investigative authorities at Villamarista are false rumors, it cannot be said that they mistreat anyone there, or harass anyone, or repress anyone.

Felipe Pérez Roque.- I should add a few clarifications to what you have seen here. I will say this: There are 37 defendants who allegedly worked as "independent journalists". I have seen publications where it has been said that we have arrested the leading Cuban journalists, that we have arrested the Cuban intelligentsia. This is a particularly absurd, superficial claim, which truly amazes me.

Of the 37 defendants who have claimed for years to be "independent journalists", while doing their work as agents of the United States government in Cuba, only four actually studied journalism and were journalists at some time in their lives. Is that clear? Four out of 37. And in Cuba there is no such thing as a technical degree in journalism, or anywhere else in the world for that matter. Is that clear?

Four of them studied journalism at a university and worked at some point as journalists, four of the 37. Out of the 37, a total of 14 have had some type of university studies, including those four, is that clear? So now you can help me, please, to clarify things to those who have obviously had misleading information, though certainly not bad faith.

Please, help us inform them that in Cuba, in addition to the 157 correspondents who work for the foreign media –some are citizens of other countries, others are Cuban, 157 in all, and many are here now– there are currently, working in Cuba as journalists, with university degrees in journalism extended by our universities after five years of study, and often with post-graduate studies in other institutions, universities around the world, 2175 journalists. Please, clarify that all of you here are the journalists, and them, the 2175 Cuban journalists who are working today for 548 Cuban media organizations –five hundred and forty-eight!– radio, television, printed publications, of which 237 have digital versions. That is the Cuban press and not the mercenaries who publish in the Miami Herald what their bosses instruct them to, as we will see later. Because we have more news for you, all right?

So, please, let's see if the fact gets across that there were four who had been journalists at some point in their lives, out of the 37, and that 14 set foot in a university at one time or another. And that here there are more than 2000 Cuban journalists and 157 foreign journalists who have degrees, who have worked as journalists, who have recognized careers. So, we hope they will no longer insult our professionals and all of you, whose work we appreciate and respect, all of you who work as professionals and inform the public and play an important social role that we recognize and support. But really, using the title of journalists for these mercenaries who participate in conspiracies to subvert Cuba is something that offends our sensitivity.

I should say, on the other hand, that there are more than 60,000 economists and accountants in Cuba. The idea that the leading Cuban economists have been accused is something that insults our intelligence. There are more than 60,000, and not a single one was there, is that clear? More than 60,000.

There are more than 700,000 university graduates in Cuba. When I see certain personalities claiming that the finest Cuban intellectuals have been accused, it makes me think about our comrades, our living legends of classic ballet, music, literature, poetry, painting, acting, our prestigious journalists, our authors. It seems to me that this disregard, this limiting of Cuban intellectuals to that group of people, among whom there are few university graduates, few intellectuals, few people who have worked in journalism at some point, it seems to me that this is really an insult to the efforts we have made in pursuit of the education and culture of our people.

So, please help us to clarify this, that all of the university graduates in Cuba were not put on trial, that there are more than 700,000 of them in Cuba. And although I am saying this, we are not really bothered by it. You see, we do not allow our patience to be exhausted, we do not allow ourselves to be provoked by these statements. But, we believe that the truth should be said with honesty, regardless of the positions or views one may have towards Cuba.

Lastly, with regard to this matter, I want to say that the prosecutors have used the following articles of Cuban legislation, of laws previously existing in Cuba. No one is being judged on the basis of a law passed after he was charged. This is a state of law; this is a country with respectable institutions that carry out their work.

They have applied Article 91 of the Cuban Penal Code, Law 62 of 1987, which came, in turn, from the Spanish Penal Code. This article has been a part of the Cuban penal law since Cuba was a colony of Spain, and it is almost exactly repeated in the U.S. Penal Code. It provides that: "Actions against the independence or territorial integrity of the State. He who executes an action in the interest of a foreign state with the purpose of harming the independence of the Cuban state or the integrity of its territory shall incur a sentence of 10 to 20 years of deprivation of liberty or death."

It was taken from the Cuban Social Defense Code of 1936, which in turn came from the Spanish legislation. Is that clear?

We consider, and the prosecutors consider, and the people of Cuba consider that someone who receives money from a foreign power, supports the blockade, helps to spread biased information to justify the blockade; commits actions in service of a foreign power; anyone who provides information to facilitate the application of the Helms-Burton Act is committing actions in the service of a foreign power, and therefore, our laws should serve us to defend ourselves from such conduct.

That we had not done so before? It is true. We have been patient, as I said already, we have been tolerant. But we have been compelled to defend ourselves.

Additionally, they have applied several articles of Law No. 88 on the Protection of National Independence and the Economy of Cuba, the Cuban antidote to the Helms-Burton Act. And Cuba was not the only state that proclaimed that it was a crime in its territory to collaborate with the Helms-Burton Act, or to obey it. Canada made it a law. In Canada it is a crime to collaborate or comply with the Helms-Burton Act. The European Union adopted a regulation, and in other countries, in Mexico, in Argentina, laws were passed that make collaboration or compliance with the Helms-Burton Act a punishable crime. It is a crime in these countries to comply with the Helms-Burton Act, as a result of these antidote laws, which are measures of legitimate defense from the extraterritorial nature of the Act. How could we possibly not have a law to protect ourselves from it? And this law has been invoked.

It has been said that these are prisoners of conscience that they have been charged for thinking or for speaking and I categorically reject this notion. What have been judged here are actions and conducts typified as crimes by the law, we have not judged ideas. We win battles of ideas with ideas, as José Martí said, and we are very strong in the field of ideas. We punish actions and conducts.

I have here the articles of Law No. 88 on the Protection of National Independence and the Economy:

Article 5.1. "He who seeks out information to be used in the application of the Helms-Burton Act, the blockade and the economic war against our people, aimed at disrupting internal order, destabilizing the country and liquidating the socialist state and the independence of Cuba, shall incur a sanction of deprivation of liberty.

Article 6.1. "He who gathers, reproduces, disseminates subversive material from the government of the United States of America, its agencies, representative bodies, officials or any foreign entity to support the objectives of the Helms-Burton Act, the blockade and the war, shall incur..." It has been said that they are in jail because they had Mark Twain books in

their homes, because they had The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, or the Bible. These accusations offend us and insult the truth.

Why would it not be a crime in Cuba to spread propaganda from the government of the United States, manuals for internal subversion, texts that speak in favor of maintaining the blockade against Cuba? Why should we not be able to defend ourselves from the longest blockade in history? Why? Our country has the right, by virtue of the Charter of the United Nations, to defend its right to self-determination, to choose its own system, and it has the authority for its laws to contemplate as crimes any conduct or actions conducive to an aggression against our country, that are financed from abroad, and are therefore a crime.

No one is killed for this, no one is tortured for this, but we do punish them, and our people demand that we strongly defend the Revolution, and we have a public opinion that sees how airplanes are seized and boats arrive there; that sees how the groups that train with heavy weaponry to attack our country can act with impunity in Florida; who have suffered the deaths of their loved ones in decades of terrorist actions. Why should we not defend ourselves?

I am invoking here our right to legitimate defense established in the Charter of the United Nations, and we are the victims of an economic, political and propaganda war. Anyone who collaborates here in Cuba with those objectives has to know they are committing a crime.

Article 7. "He who, with the goal of achieving the objectives of the Helms-Burton Act" – which, as we have seen, provides money for financing subversion– "supports the blockade and the economic war, collaborates by any means with foreign radio or television stations, newspapers, magazines or any other media..." And we are not referring here to foreign correspondents, the law is very clear about this, but we know that these are supposed journalists who are financed and who are told what they have to write, who demand of the European Union that Cuba not be accepted in the Cotonou Agreement, as if this were that important for Cuba –and I will be referring to this later– as if they could pressure Cuba, which has withstood more than 40 years of blockade without bending down before this or that measure.

These are the ones who have declared it, and written it; those who have asked for a condemnation of Cuba in the Commission on Human Rights, which is what is used to justify the blockade. These who have asked for the blockade to be maintained, because they say that "conditions are not yet ripe." The same who, in addition, receive money to do this, and live well off of it, something we'll see later.

So, they have applied these articles of the Law on the Protection of National Independence and the Economy of Cuba, Law No. 88, and the Cuban Penal Code.

At the same time, there has been more than ample proof presented, material evidence, the testimony of expert witnesses and other witnesses. For example, expert witnesses from the Banco Central de Cuba demonstrated to one of the courts the way in which money flows from the U.S. government and agencies to their agents in Cuba. The dirty money trail is clear, we know how it gets here through the government of the United States' front agencies, NGOs and groups and institutes in the United States, and from there to Cuba, smuggled in, under the cover of family remittances, it is all known in detail. This is public money from USAID, we are not talking here about the special services money, the money turned over directly here by the Interests Section.

After having provided this information, I will now move on to inform you of some other very interesting things.

The government of the United States plays the main role in the inception of these groups, the direction of these groups, the financing of these groups, the stimulation and protection of these mercenary groups in Cuba. It is the United States Interests Section in Havana --and this has been amply proven in the trials-- that creates, directs, finances, stimulates and protects the creation and subversive work of its agents in Cuba. By virtue of what? By virtue of the fulfillment of the Helms-Burton Act.

Section 109: "Authorization of support" –it says– "for democratic and human rights groups."

"The President is authorized to furnish assistance" –in other words, money, money from the American taxpayers– "and provide other support for individuals and organizations in Cuba..."

Section 115 of the Helms-Burton Act: "Effect of this Act on lawful" –isn't it odd?– "United States Government activities."

"Nothing in this Act" –in other words, none of what is said here, that the government and the president must provide support through USAID– "prohibits any lawfully authorized investigation" --look at these interesting adjectives– "protection, or intelligence activity of a law enforcement agency, or of an intelligence agency of the United States."

This is to avoid any possible confusion, so nobody thinks that now the only way to provide money and organize dissidents in Cuba is through the legal route. The legislators, Senator Helms and Congressman Burton, ensured that the text made it clear that one thing has nothing to do with the other, that is, the intelligence agencies can continue to provide money, funding and so forth through secret channels.

This is what they are doing in Cuba. They try to present this as a movement that has originated in Cuba, the "civil society" –as they call it– in Cuba, ignoring the more than 2000 Cuban non-governmental organizations and associations, that range from associations of chefs de cuisine to women's organizations, environmental groups, think tanks, youth organizations, students' organizations, representing the most varied sectors of social and economic activity in the country, truly insulting all of these organizations and their tens and hundreds of thousands, in some cases even millions of members.

What are they doing here? They are presenting this as the emergence of an opposition movement in Cuba, while it is actually an attempt to fabricate an opposition financed from abroad, in compliance with the Helms-Burton Act.

We, who have had to defend the Revolution for more than 40 years, we have heard Mr. Cason declaring in Miami, "The future of the Cubans is up to themselves; we want them, those inside and those outside Cuba to come to an agreement." He means those who think the same way as the Batista supporters, that they will come back here to claim the wealth that they stole from the people and that the Revolution nationalized.

We recall that this is exactly what they said to the patriots who fought for Cuban's independence, and declared that "Cuba must be fully and truly free," through a resolution of the U.S. Congress, and then the country was militarily occupied and the Platt Amendment was imposed and the natural resources of the country were stolen.

When we hear Mr. Cason, we remember that they are also saying now that "the future of the Iraqis is up to the Iraqis," including, perhaps, the management of the oil wells and the new oil contracts, I guess.

We have much experience in the defense of our sovereignty and we do not believe in such fairy tales. We know that subversion is fabricated from abroad, that they are attempting to create a Trojan horse here. Thus, we are exercising our sovereign right to legally confront it, abiding by the law and ethics, never resorting to such things like kidnapping and

assassination, never creating death squads, never violating anyone's physical and moral integrity.

Now, I have said that the United States Interests Section in Havana creates dissident groups, organizes them, and I maintain this. Here is one of photographs presented in one of the trials. (He shows it) Hundreds of photographs were presented.

Here is Mr. Cason at the moment when he, a foreign diplomat accredited in Havana, is founding the youth branch of the Cuban Liberal Party. It is inconceivable, the founder of a party in Cuba. A foreign citizen founding a party in Cuba, it's amazing. There is no legislation in the world that allows foreign citizens to form parties within a country. Well, here he is, captured by the camera at the moment when he was founding the youth branch. In other words, not only the party, he was creating here the youth branch, or rather, the next generation, those who will try to overthrow the Revolution in 2080 or 2091. By the looks of things, it is going to be a long war.

Here he is at a meeting, at the moment when the organizing committee, there are four people, the four members of these new group that is being founded. Here he is with the full membership of this new movement, an assembly, there are the four of them and there is Mr. Cason right there, looking very elegant. You can see on the living room table there, trays of ham, some glasses over there, surely there was a little something to quench their thirst, right? There he is.

The United States Interests Section creates these groups in Cuba. I maintain this, and it has been proven in the trials.

I want to repeat, I am not in any way confusing the actions of the government, of some of its agents, of a U.S. diplomat in Havana; I am not confusing this with the attitude of the people of the United States towards Cuba. I distinguish very well between the two, and an anti-American bug has bitten none of us, nor do we cultivate hatred or chauvinism. We do defend our right to independence and our homeland with the same passion that we put in our solidarity with the world and our respect for all of its peoples, including the people of the United States.

I have something else here that is very interesting. Free access passes, open access at any time of the day or night for some of these mercenaries to enter the United States Interests Section in Havana; all they have to do is show their pass.

We Cubans cannot enter, because there are mechanisms of protection. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Cubans to enter: They are taken their fingerprints, they are searched, frisked.

Well, there are some who do not have to go through all of this. As we can see here, there is an Open pass for Mr. Oscar Elías Biscet, for any time of the day or night. An Open pass for Mr. Héctor Palacios.

The new restrictions imposed by the Department of Homeland Security, which have reinforced the protective measures in U.S. official buildings that have made it more difficult to get across the border –which is a logical reaction to the terrorist acts of September 11– do not apply to these people, because they have the status of officials there. They can walk right in like Mr. Cason, just show their passes and walk right in. I think that, in time, since they are already known there, they will simple be told, "Come right in." That is the truth.

Now then, how is it possible for an ordinary, everyday Cuban to have unrestricted access, with an official pass signed by the Section Chief, to enter any part of the United States Interests Section in Cuba at any time of the day or night? It seems that you would have to be

someone on very intimate terms, because I have never had this kind of pass or possibility. When I go to an embassy, the ambassador is informed in advance, and authorizes the people at the entrance to let me in. Even the Cuban security personnel who protect the embassy itself are advised.

Here is another moment of celebration (he shows a photograph). Here is Mrs. Vicky Huddleston, and everyone is full of smiles, wishing her the best of luck on her new mission in Mali, where she has been appointed an ambassador. They wished her the best for her work and her surroundings. They were the conversing, a meeting had concluded, there are also a few other officials from the Interests Section.

Thus, we are very much aware of the responsibility of the Interests Section in the creation of these groups.

Here is another one –I do not want to bore you– here is another interesting one. You can see a table, numerous photographs and a table. There are the little American flags, it looks like there was a reception, and here there is a bottle, which looks to me like a bottle of Baccardi rum. I am almost certain it is a bottle of Baccardi. Well, there are the bottles, there was a celebration, and there are photographs. This is the way plans are made to try to overthrow the Cuban Revolution.

Mr. Cason should know that we know, he should know that before he arrived in Cuba, we were already dealing with these kinds of things. And, well, he will probably persist in his efforts to achieve his goals, but he should know that it will not be easy, because he is not dealing with naive people, inexperienced in defending their sovereignty and independence.

Now then, I have said that the government of the United States directs these groups. Now I will say that it finances them. The money for these groups is official money from the United States government. This is only the program of the United States Agency for International Development, USAID; as they have said what they give is the smallest part.

"To increase solidarity with Cuban activists in the world," to provide for their trips, prizes, recognition, the money allocated for the year 2002 was 8,099,181 USD. If the United States Agency for International Development, in a climate of normal relations with Cuba, were to devote this money to the real economic and social well-being of the Cuban people, Cuba could use this money to build schools, furbish polyclinics, construct housing; but the money is given for subversion.

And it is not that we want that money, far from it, nor do we need it. We are developing our country despite the blockade they have imposed on us, and our people know this, and we have confronted the difficulties.

"To help create independent NGOs in Cuba", 1,602,000 USD; "to give a voice to independent journalists", 2,027,000 USD; "to plan the transition in Cuba", 2,132,000 USD; "to assess the program", how it is working, 335,000 USD. How have they done this? By creating groups in the United States that receive this money, and that keep most of it, since business is business, and then send part of it to these groups in Cuba.

The Center for a Free Cuba received 2,300,000 USD in 2002. It receives information from the human rights groups, then sends it out, disseminates it, distributes it; Internal Dissidence Working Group, 250,000 USD; Freedom House, the ones in charge of the Program for the Transition in Cuba, in other words, the ones involved in the most strategic area –Frank Calzon was in on this– 1,325,000 USD; the Institute for Democracy in Cuba... All of this is in Miami, a few groups are in Washington, but most are in Miami. There are always plenty of

quick-witted Cubans there who know that part of this money does not have to be justified, so it goes directly into "representation costs", and the rest they send it here.

The International Republican Institute, one of the organizers of the prizes and the tours abroad, one of the financers of the trips made by some of the "illustrious" patriots who have been awarded prizes around the world; Dissidence Support Group, 1,200,000 USD. They have been spreading it around. Basically, those are the groups.

Cubanet receives news reports and publishes them, 98,000 USD, their budget has been cut: American Center for International Labor Solidarity –look what they are devoted to, working to "persuade foreign investors not to invest in Cuba," that is their declared social goal– they get 168,575 USD from the United States government annually.

That is where the money comes from and, of course, from the special services.

How does it get here? For example, Frank Hernández Trujillo, head of the so-called Dissidence Support Group, based in Miami, naturally, received 400,000 USD in 2001 – that is, from USAID alone– and 1,200,000 USD in 2002, they tripled the money they gave him. This is published in the official websites of the United States government. What did he do with the money? He sent things to Cuba by smuggling or sending them with people who were coming.

I have here one of his lists, because he has to justify his expenditures -this was seized during the investigations for the trials– and this is one of his lists, explaining what the money was used for. So, here we have: computer, series number, really, all very professional. Here are the names of the people in Cuba, these "patriots" who are going to bring about a transition and fight for "democracy" in Cuba, and next to each name is the money they were given and what they have used it for here. In other words, over there Frank has to say, "I gave him the money, and the money is for such and such." Here we have the list of things that were being smuggled into the country, a number of containers, violating customs regulations:

So-and-so, two lamps. Lamp, VCR, VCR, two lamps. Lamp. Special package for Armando Villar. Electric stove for Angel Jiménez. Telephone, telephone, telephone. For Marta Beatriz Roque, Kit No. 1.

There are a few packages, like "gift bags", with a variety of things inside, and this one is referred to as Kit No. 1.

Ana María Espinosa Escabillo, set of pots and pans (Laughter), to fight for democracy in Cuba. Lamp, television set, VCR, package, package. Packages of food and medicines.

Because it must be said that one of the cruelest ironies of the work of these groups has been that the government of the United States has facilitated their access to food and medicine, so that in the neighborhoods where they operate, they can take advantage of the shortages, and the need, and the desperation of a parent who is looking for a certain medication during these years when we have not been able to guarantee its supply, despite all our efforts. And they use this to do their recruitment work, as a way of getting people to owe them favors, and they have set up so-called "distribution centers" to give people food and medicines that they would not normally have access to, precisely because of the U.S. blockade, which they help to maintain.

So, it is truly ironic. Here you have it: money, money, television set, lamps, set of 21 pots –it does not say for what– baby layette. This is what Idelfonso Hidalgo received, a baby layette. We do not know what this has to do with the "struggle for democracy" in Cuba. This is one of

these groups. Money to live off of this money. They do not work, the majority of them, they have lived off of this for years and years.

Here is something else that is interesting: receipts for the delivery of money; that is, proof that the money was received. This is money that was distributed by Héctor Palacios to other people, money that came from Puerto Rico to Cuba, also illegally. Here Mr. Héctor Palacios is writing to the gentleman in Puerto Rico responsible for this financing operation, his name is Enrique Blanco, Independent Libraries of Cuba is what it says on the letterhead of the paper.

"Mr. Enrique Blanco, August 1, 2002.

"I am enclosing receipts to justify expenditures, with regard to the money you sent and your instructions for its distribution." Is that clear? I am reporting to you on what I did with the money you sent me and how I fulfilled your instructions, addressed to this gentleman based in Puerto Rico.

"There are 160 dollars left in the fund, which will be frozen until I receive further instructions from you." A very precise accounting, it complies with the generally accepted principles, seemingly.

"Sincerely, Your friend, Héctor Palacios."

Here are the receipts, bills.

"This is to confirm delivery of 30 USD to Mr. Iván Hernández Carrillo, coordinator for the province of Matanzas" –because in Cuba, 30 dollars is a lot of money, since none of these people have to use these dollars to pay for healthcare, to send their children to school, to have a pension when they get old; all of these people can enjoy a baseball game at the stadium for one peso, so 30 dollars is a heck of a salary, these people can live like company executives in the United States– "provided as aid for the independent libraries project..." And so on, there is a long list of receipts, bills (he shows it), which proves where the money comes from.

Here we have a gentleman called Oscar Espinosa Chepe, some of us at the Foreign Ministry remember that name. This gentleman received, between January of 2002 and January of 2003, in one year, according to the receipts and bills, 7154 dollars. I imagine that this is more than what almost all of the serious journalists who are here and who work hard for their money, receive, that is 7154 USD. In his house, he had hidden in the lining of a suit – who knows why, it was money well earned, and in Cuba there is no prohibition against possession of hard currency, you can put it in a bank and earn interest on it– 13,660 USD, his savings, in addition to the 7000 USD in a year. He has not worked for approximately ten years. Where did he get this money from for submitting what he was told to publish?

He got the money from Cubanet. Cubanet, as I already said, received 343,000 USD in 2001 and over 800,000 USD in 2002 for this purpose.

Now, here is something really interesting. It is the record of the money received by Oscar Manuel Espinosa Chepe, and the dates, January 14, 165 USD; February 15, 220 USD; March 14, 140 USD; July 23, 1,750 USD; August 22, 1,996 USD; September 16, 1,923 USD. It is a record of all the payments he received.

Héctor Palacios had almost 5,000 USD in his house. Anyone can have dollars, who knows why he had the money hidden in a medicine bottle. If it was money honestly earned, he had no reason to hide it.

I should say that in the work carried out prior to these trials, tens of thousands of dollars were seized, but strangely enough, only 1,200 Cuban pesos. Almost all of these people are

unemployed, they do not work in Cuba, they do not have jobs, they live off of this, all of "fighting for freedom and democracy."

As you can see, all of the accounting in the "struggle for democracy in Cuba" is in dollars, 1,200 Cuban pesos was all that was found in the homes of all these people, out of everything they could have had. I believe I have to say this, and I try to contain myself and not lose my patience, you can understand, and our people understand, how irritating it is to know that there are people who receive money and live off of this, in the service of a foreign power that attacks their people, while in Cuba there are tens of thousands of doctors and hundreds of thousands of professors who work in the greatest austerity to bring well-being to the people, to serve the people, to guarantee their basic human rights, which are not guaranteed for millions of people in the world today. To guarantee them the right to healthcare, which is denied to 40 million U.S. citizens who do not have the right to healthcare guaranteed, to guarantee them the right to education, which is denied to almost 900 million people in the world who cannot read and write. And then see these people "fighting for democracy" is really something that...

Now I would like for us to take a look at the testimony that was voluntarily given at the trial by Mr. Osvaldo Alfonso, whose name has also been heard these last few days, over and over again.

(A video is shown)

Presiding Judge.- The law grants you the right to testify or to abstain from doing so. Do you wish to testify?

Osvaldo Alfonso Valdés.- Yes, I do.

Presiding Judge.- Do you wish to express yourself freely?

Osvaldo Alfonso Valdés.- Yes.

Presiding Judge.- Go ahead.

Osvaldo Alfonso Valdés.- Can I read my declaration?

Presiding Judge.- Yes.

Osvaldo Alfonso Valdés.- I, Osvaldo Alfonso Valdés, recognize that in our opposition work we may have been used by officials from the U.S. Interests Section, which means that in our intent to undertake a peaceful struggle, we have responded in one way or another to the interests of the United States.

We know that the resources we receive for our work come from funds approved by the government of that country. I recall an occasion, a meeting with an official from USAID, in his office, when he had come to verify if the resources from the office reached us. At that time a number of alternative routes were being studied for getting these resources to us, some were in agreement, others were not, because it would mean obviously demonstrating that we were supported by the Interests Section, something we denied. Some proposed that the money be sent through representatives abroad, so as not to demonstrate the direct link between the U.S. government and the opposition. He asked us about what we were going to do for the Ibero-American Summit, if any document was going to be sent. The need for unity in internal dissidence was also addressed.

On that occasion it was recommended that it was important for us to meet with people from former socialist countries, like Poland, Czechoslovakia and others, since they have experiences that could be very useful to us in the fight against the socialist regime currently in power in Cuba.

Participating in this meeting, on behalf of the Interests Section, was Mrs. Vicky Huddleston, the visitor, whose last name I do not remember very well, I think it might have been Muller; and on behalf of Cuba, among others, Mr. Jesús Llanes Pelletier, who has since passed away.

I recognize that I have received funds and material aid from organizations based in Miami, and that these resources come from the government of the United States, as a result of which, to some extent, we have been serving those interests."

Felipe Pérez Roque.- This is the declaration he made when they said to him at the end, "You have the right to testify or not, do you want to do it?" "Yes. Can I read?" "Yes." This is what he said.

Here is a receipt for money delivered to this gentleman (he shows it).

"This is to confirm the delivery to Mr. Osvaldo Alfonso, member of the Todos Unidos rapporteur commission, of 400 USD, which was sent to him as humanitarian aid by the brothers of Cuban Democratic Action," an organization in Miami, which in 2002 received 400,000 USD from the United States Agency for International Development.

Here is something else interesting.

It is a letter sent by Carlos Alberto Montaner. (He reads out)

"Dear Osvaldo:", he says, "Here you have 200 USD." –January 26, 2001– "Unfortunately there is not much to say, except for what we all know, that the regime is becoming tougher and everyone's horizon is the death of Fidel. Then, we'll see. It's all very sad, but that's the way things are. Sincerely, Carlos Alberto Montaner."

Well then, that was January 26, 2001: 200 USD.

March 22, two months later: "Dear Osvaldo, a friend you know has been kind enough to get these 30,000 pesetas to you." The euro was still not the official currency, I suppose. "Very soon you will receive a call from some high-level Spanish friends to talk about the Varela Project. I recommended five names to found this new idea: Payá, Alfonso, Arcos, Raúl Rivero and Tania Quintero."

I am going to repeat it: "Very soon you will receive a call from some high-level Spanish friends to talk about the Varela Project," March 22, 2001. "I recommended five names: Payá, Alfonso, Arcos, Raúl Rivero and Tania Quintero. I'm sending you my best wishes and a copy of Encuentro magazine. Carlos Alberto Montaner."

Two days later, March 24, 2001: "Dear Osvaldo, a common friend has been kind enough to bring you these 200 USD" –that is, two days after the 30,000 pesetas, there might be cash flow problems, you know how these things are sometimes– "and a personal message that Raúl will give to you. Call me in Spain when you get this note. Sincerely, Carlos Alberto Montaner." This is an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency, publicly recognized and confessed, in Miami and in Cuba, and in Madrid by those that know him well.

This is the story behind the financing. I said that they create them, I said that they direct them, I said that they finance them, and I say that they stimulate and protect them.

Now I'm going to read this bizarre letter, it's something really quite astonishing. We found out about it first through a television report from Miami. It turns out that Luis Zúñiga, a terrorist and a member of the military branch of the Cuban-American National Foundation, involved in the financing of the bombs planted in the hotels in Havana, linked to the plots to assassinate President Fidel Castro, this gentleman, who has been the representative of the Miami-based groups at the Commission on Human Rights over these last years, pulls out and reads a letter to the press in Miami. Take a look at how Channel 51 in Miami reports it:

"Despite being in the midst of a war -this was on March 27, 2003- "President Bush has sent a strong backing in the form of a letter to a well-known opposition leader imprisoned in Cuba, which demonstrates that the White House has not forgotten the dissidents. Juan Manuel Cao says that this has not been the only sign from President Bush".

I think this coincided with his visit to the South Command and, well, just imagine, with all the mob gathered there, he had to do something with them.

Juan Manuel Cao says, "A bell of hope has rung out for dissidents in Cuba. The president of the United States, George Bush, has made a stop on the road to Baghdad and written a letter of solidarity with Cuban prisoner Oscar Elias Biscet," something truly moving.

Then Luis Zúñiga takes over, reading an excerpt that says: "...Your effort and your example are the incarnation of democratic values, including self-determination..." President Bush talking about democracy, self-determination; Kafka pales in comparison. Our curiosity led us to seek out the full text of the letter, which is right here (he shows it).

Letter dated March 26: "Dear Dr. Biscet." Signed: "The President of the United States, George Bush.

"Congratulations for the recognition you have received from the International Republican Institute," the one that we saw had received ,600,000 USD for the year 2002, the one that creates awards with this money by arranging prizes in Europe and trips to receive the recognition.

"Congratulations for the recognition you have received from the International Republican Institute with the prize awarded by them, the popular democracy prize. Your effort and your example are the incarnation of democratic values, including self-determination (...) Laura and I continue praying for you... Sincerely, George Bush."

I have never seen a letter from President Bush congratulating, for example, Dr. Concepción Campa, also known as Conchita, the head researcher and leader of the team that created the Cuban vaccine against meningococcal meningitis, the only one of its kind in the world, thanks to which not a single child has died of this disease in Cuba in years and of which millions of doses are used around the world, and who has earned an international prize from the World Intellectual Property Organization, the most prestigious organization in this field. Has anyone seen a letter from President Bush congratulating Conchita? I have not seen one.

I have not seen a letter from President Bush congratulating any of the Cuban athletes who have become world champions or Olympic champions and have now reached the time for retirement. Instead, I have seen how they denied visas to our national wrestling team, keeping them from participating in the World Championship held in the United States, after two years of training for this competition.

So, I am rather taken aback by this letter that President Bush wrote to that Cuban, while he has never written to any scientists, writers, journalists, outstanding Cubans, men and women of the arts, the sciences, culture, and production I have never seen it. I did not see him write to Comrade Lazo to congratulate him on the eradication of the Aedes aegypti mosquito here in the City of Havana, which guarantees the good health of all of the inhabitants of the capital, just like the rest of the country.

So I am bound to have my suspicions when I see a letter from Mr. Bush to Mr. Oscar Elias Biscet, at the moment when Mr. Bush went to Miami to soothe public opinion after the events of the war in Iraq were unleashed.

Here we have another example, the Revista de Cuba (he shows it), a publication of the Manuel Márquez Sterling journalists society, the December 2002 edition. Can anyone guess

where this magazine was published? I will give you a hint, it was not at the Foreign Ministry (laughter). Where could they have printed the Revista de Cuba magazine of the Márquez Sterling journalists society? You are getting closer. Yes, at the United States Interests Section in Havana! That is how they do it, each edition is printed there. In other words, the Interests Section is like the press, you could say, like the publishing house for the magazine put out by the "independent Cuban journalists".

That is why when they try to say that these are non-governmental organizations, I always clarify that they are governmental since they belong to the government of the United States and act in its service.

Well, we also have here a copy of El Disidente magazine, this is another case. The Interests Section distributes it. In this case the Interests Section distributes it, but it does not print it; it is printed in Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico, the magazine received 60,000 USD from the United States government for its publication, and then they send it here in the diplomatic pouch, and the Interests Section distributes this magazine, which is called El Disidente, La carta de Cuba, and other pamphlets. They distribute all of it.

Well, I think I have provided you with some interesting information. Finally, I think these two testimonies that we are going to show now will be of great interest to you. We will watch them now, they are rather short.

Prosecutor.- Tell us your name, where you live, and what you do.

Néstor Baguer.- With pleasure.

My name is Néstor Baguer Sánchez Galarraga. I live in Centro Habana. I am a journalist by profession; but in addition, since 1960, I have worked for the state security services.

Prosecutor.- What is your name in the state security services?

Néstor Baguer - Octavio.

Prosecutor.- Octavio. Let's call him Octavio.

Now, Néstor, would you be so kind as to tell us about the origins of the Independent Press Association, if you have been associated with this kind of activity.

Néstor Baguer.- This was suggested to me by counterrevolutionary individuals, because they needed a journalist, first of all. But I took it on as a job to do for the state security services, so that, instead of falling into the hands of those who were going to do a lot of harm, I could try to minimize this harm.

Prosecutor.- And it helped you to receive information, and led people to come to you who were interested in giving information to the enemy?

Néstor Baguer.- Precisely.

Prosecutor.- How did it work? How is this kind of information passed abroad?

Néstor Baguer - A first point: the people who first got me involved were the US Interests Section. I didn't know anyone there and one of them called me, invited me to go and talk to them and showed great interest; they said they'd support me in every way so I could get the job done. Right after that, the journalists arrived. Well I say journalists, but of the 30 or 40 who turned up, only two were actually journalists. I was one and there was one other; of the rest, no-one. Because I can tell you that of the 100 and more people who call themselves independent journalists, there are no more than five or six professionals. The rest are mercenaries paid to slander, because they tell lies, insult, show disrespect for our head of state and our government. They're not journalists, they're information terrorists.

Prosecutor - When they cook up this information, who do they send it to?

Néstor Baguer - They send it to me, and then I - as I've got the phone connections, direct lines - I used to talk directly to Radio Marti; but then they come from the US, Cuban counter-revolutionaries who set up agencies to help those of us here in Cuba.
Prosecutor - What sort of agencies are these? Do you remember the names of any of these agencies?
Néstor Baguer - Certainly. There was CUBANET, CubaPress - they started springing up like mushrooms.
Prosecutor – Néstor you used the word "mercenaries"
Néstor Baguer - Yes.
Prosecutor - Meaning that someone was paying them.
Néstor Baguer - Of course.
Prosecutor - How were these payments made?
Néstor Baguer - I'll explain it to you. They - the US administration - hand over millions: I've got the figures and I can prove it. For instance, CUBANET gets about 2 or 3 million dollars for those working for them. For instance, my agency worked for CUBANET.
Prosecutor - What means did they use to send the money?
Néstor Baguer - For instance, the majority use Transcard. There are some, when the amount involved is a rather large, which they send by mail, they call them couriers. The embassy hands out a lot of things - presents, you know, lots of parties, lots of little attentions - plastic bags arrive with pocket radios tuned to Radio Marti, with tape recorders, cameras. Basically everything you need for your work. You go there on the days when they're receiving visitors and they give you a party, then they show you into a room with hundreds of carrier bags full of all these presents so you can choose what you want - not just one or two, you can take whatever you want. And what happens? Some people take eight or ten of the bags because these little radios are special, they're very good radios, and they sell them for $20 each. They keep one and sell the rest. The same thing with the cassette players: to have a tape recorder today is a good business, because then they sell it straight away.
Prosecutor - Now when you go to the US Interests Section, do they give you some sort of indication of what you should be doing here?
Néstor Baguer - They tell you what subjects to deal with. "You should write about this, you should write about the food shortage, about the blackouts, about the transport situation, the lack of medicines, the treatment in the hospitals, the treatment in the prisons". In other words they tell you what subjects they're interested in -not what Cuba's interested in, but what they want published abroad.
Prosecutor - Which officials in the US Interests Section did you mainly have contact with?
Néstor Baguer - It's always with the head of the Press and Propaganda section; the head and his Number Two. They're the ones who deal with such matters.
Prosecutor - As far as the money they pay you is concerned, as you were saying a few minutes ago. When it has come by different routes, are there discrepancies between the different members of the group because of losses, disappearances, share-outs of the money?
Néstor Baguer - Not just discrepancies. There have been thefts, they steal from each other. There are journalists who've worked six months without getting a penny, then when they look into it, it turns out the money was sent to Cuba by the agency, but because it's almost always addressed to the leader of the group, he takes it for himself. There was a case just recently someone kept six months' money sent for all the journalists.

Prosecutor - Which case was that?
Néstor Baguer - A self-styled journalist called Jorge Olivera. He kept the money sent for the people working for him over a period of six months.
Prosecutor - Nestor, if you can, we would like you to tell us who are the main officials at the US Interests Section who you've dealt with during these activities.
Néstor Baguer - Yes. The first was Kozack, then Vicky and then Cason, the one who's there now. And then, naturally, with the people in Press and Propaganda. They've put Gallegos there now; before, there were several, Beagle for example. Dozens of them, because the turnover there is pretty fast. So I've dealt with quite a few, including women - one called Mary who was married to an Argentinean and spoke perfect Spanish. In other words, I've had dealings with all the people who've passed through that Section.
Prosecutor - And to get access to the section, how did you ...?
Néstor Baguer - You have to ask for a pass. They give you a pass for a set day and time. But mine is a special one, they call it an open pass. That means I can go there any day, any time.
Prosecutor - What are the main activities these officials arrange with you, that they get involved in? Or rather, what are the various kinds of activity they arrange with journalists like yourself?
Néstor Baguer - Whenever there's an event attended by Cubans, they all come. They all come and bring their wives. Because what they want is to talk to as many Cubans as possible, to see who they can get on board. "Listen, what about the prices in the shops, at the market? Are there shortages or what?"
Prosecutor - When you go to the section office, do you get the chance to do any kind of journalistic work there, or get access to information?
Néstor Baguer - Well, there's the Internet Room, full of computers, and you can use them. For example, I can use them without having to book a slot. That's what the Cuban journalists have to do; they give them a two-hour slot on a specific day.
Prosecutor - This room you've told us about, do you have the possibility of taking any publications from there?
Néstor Baguer - They always send me the publications; they send them to my home. All the publications that arrive there - newspapers, magazines - they send them to my home.
Prosecutor - Were you there at an event on March 14?
Néstor Baguer - Yes
Prosecutor - What was the aim of that event, and where was it held exactly?
Néstor Baguer - It was in the dining room at Mr. Cason's residence - in his home, that is. Then it split up; we were split into three groups: one, the journalism ethics group, was chaired by me; another dealt with contacts and relations with the foreign press; the third also discussed the subjects to be worked on and those questions.
I got the ethics group at the request of the Americans themselves; but you can image, I ... France Press was there, Spanish TV was there, so was German TV. There were about five of these channels (Laughter).
Prosecutor - Can you tell us anything about Raúl Rivero and his involvement in activities of this kind?
Néstor Baguer - He's an alcoholic, and alcoholism has pushed him over the edge. He made a scene at UPEC and at UNEAC, shouting obscenities, and got himself banned from everywhere. So he went to pieces, and started sending poems and stuff abroad to earn a

living. And then when he saw that journalism had changed, was deceitful, but made money, he got onto his old comrades in UNEAC and UPEC in exile, because they were all traitors, and used his friendship with them to get somewhere to write. So these people got in touch with the American journalists and got him work with the Miami Herald, which is the most conservative paper in South Florida and, of course, paid very well.

Later, they put him in touch with the US press association, which all the American press barons belong to - it's called the InterAmerican Press Association (IAPA/SIP) - and with their influence and that of the Miami mafia they managed to get Raúl appointed Caribbean Vice-President of the Association, of course getting the salary of a vice-president of an American concern.

Prosecutor - Do they pay Raúl for the information he offers?

Néstor Baguer - Of course. And very well-paid he is.

Prosecutor - How does that work?

Néstor Baguer - They pay him in the US, the money goes to his daughter who lives in the United States.

Prosecutor - What can you tell us about Ricardo?

Néstor Baguer - Ricardo latched onto Raúl, because Ricardo is no journalist nor anything like one. He latched onto Raúl. Raúl's situation was that he was separated from all his friends. Who were his friends? The UPEC journalists and the UNEAC writers. So he was without friends. The only friend he had left was me, if you follow, and as we didn't think the same way - we didn't quarrel, but we didn't think the same way - months would go by without seeing each other - so he turned to this one who practically pushed him aside. Then he offered his house in Miramar to set up an editing center there with everything - I mean all the electronic equipment and he's got three salaried staff working there; so just about everything you need, and he handed it over to Raúl. Then Raúl set up the Márquez Sterling company with himself in charge; I mean, he's the one who runs things, while the other one is just a figurehead, there just for the sake of image.

Prosecutor - The other one is Ricardo, yes?

Néstor Baguer - The other one is Ricardo. He's the figurehead, the frontman, but he's nobody, he's nobody.

Prosecutor - Does Ricardo have any connections with the US administration, with the Interests Section?

Néstor Baguer - Yes, of course. He's the chairman of Márquez Sterling, that's where the connection is.

Prosecutor - And with some elements based in Miami? Does either of them have connections there?

Néstor Baguer - Well, Raúl does. As far as Ricardo's concerned, I don't know, because I don't know much about his background. I met him for the first time four or five months ago. Raúl yes, all the poets who've left, all the writers who've left, they're all friends of his, all of them, because they were buddies at UNEAC for years and years; drinking companions, went out on the binge together and that sort of thing. They're close fiends, he has lots. All the Cuban poets in exile, all of them are friends of Raúl.

Prosecutor - Do you know who Frank Calzón is?

Néstor Baguer - Yes, of course.

Prosecutor - Did either of these men have dealings with Frank Calzón, that you know of?

Néstor Baguer - Both Ricardo and the Fat Man (I mean Raúl), because Frank Calzon knows all of us. Since he left the agency, I've had no further contact with him. I've got his phone number and all that, but I've never had the need ...
Prosecutor - What can you tell us about Frank Calzón?
Néstor Baguer - Well, in the first place he's not a journalist. He's an old-CIA agent; he has worked for the CIA for years.

Felipe Pérez - I should clarify that Néstor Baguer, agent Octavio with the Cuban security service since 1960, is chairman of the Cuban Independent Press Association. They are two institutions, the one chaired by Raúl Rivero and the other by him. As you can see, he has a great deal of experience in this field.

Now let's turn to the subject of the advocates of human rights.

Prosecutor - Do you belong to any of these groups that profess concern with human rights?
Odilia Collazo - Yes
Prosecutor - Which one?
Odilia Collazo - The Pro Human Rights Party of Cuba
Prosecutor - What's your role there?
Odilia Collazo - Well, until now I'm President of the Pro Human Rights Party of Cuba
Prosecutor - Have you visited the Interests Section?
Odilia Collazo - Yes. I go to the Interests Section to deliver reports on human rights violations and other reports.
Prosecutor - And these people here, do they go to the Interests Section for the same purpose, to deliver reports on alleged violations of human rights?
Odilia Collazo - Well, they may deliver allegations of human rights violations, but they may also talk about economic, political and social problems.
Prosecutor - Do you have unrestricted access to the Interests Section, or is it controlled?
Odilia Collazo - No, I have free access to the Interests Section, because my pass isn't just for this year. I've had an open pass since 1991.
Prosecutor - Are there other facilities for keeping in touch with the Interests Section?
Odilia Collazo - Well, yes. We have their phone numbers - the extension numbers, cellphone numbers and their home numbers.
Prosecutor - And is this exclusive to you, or do the rest of the defendants here have access to such information?
Odilia Collazo - Well, as far as I know, Héctor Palacios has it. I don't know whether the others do.
Prosecutor - Do you have the opportunity to photocopy documents, to print out documents?
Odilia Collazo - Yes. There are printers there, there are faxes, there are computers. Being able to use the equipment is extremely useful for our work.
Prosecutor - And on these visits, do they give you specific assignments?
Odilia Collazo - Well, yes. My specific assignments; everyone has their specialization. I focus on human rights violations, and I was able to get hold of the report, the results of all those years; those reports were going to the State Department, to Geneva, to Amnesty International, Americas Watch and other organizations. Which was to motivate me, of course. I could see the results, that the work I'd done was recognized in these reports, precisely so that Cuba would be censured in Geneva.

Prosecutor - Assignments, direction, were there other information requirements that were asked for in the Interests Section?

Odilia Collazo - Yes, they were always monitoring the Cuban situation, what things were like for the population at that time. It was like a barometer of the situation. They wanted to see if there could be a social outburst here.

Prosecutor - As regards to the officials at the Interests Section, given the length of time you were engaged in these illicit activities, did you witness any change between the time Vicky Huddleston was in charge and her successor, Mr. James Cason?

Odilia Collazo - Well yes, the change was obvious to everyone. Vicky and her predecessors, like Mr. Sullivan himself and Kozack - I had good relations with Michael Kozack too - never offered us their houses, or the Interest Section, or their residence to hold our meetings. When James Cason came, I had the opportunity with other people present here to attend that meeting, and he told us that the doors of his home were open to us to meet there, to debate, to promote civil society in Cuba. I can tell you I never agreed with that.

Prosecutor - All this information you've given us, your experience, your knowledge about the supplies, the constant monitoring by the Interests Section of the activities you and others like you have been carrying on, do you conclude that all these groups of so called human rights advocates are really made up of selfless persons interested in fostering a better future for our country ?

Odilia Collazo: Well, I would like to tell you that during all these years I was very disappointed because I saw that many of the members of the pro human rights parties, not only my own, within the civil society groups, within NATURPAZ groups, for example, dealing with ecological issues, and many other organizations which exist currently were looking for ways to leave the country. A person can be in jail for 12, 20 or 30 years and when he or she gets to the Interest Section, the Refugee Department, if that person does not have the support of an opposition organization which acts as a guarantor telling that his or her behavior has been proper, this person is not accepted into the Refugee Program, and other persons who have never been in jail became members of opposition or dissident organizations with only one purpose: to use them as travel agencies, as an easy way to leave the country. But then they realize that this is nothing but a drawing of lots.

Prosecutor: Do you believe that these persons were –besides their migration motivations-- profit-oriented people?

Odilia Collazo: Well, I know of people who wanted to join us because they realized our living standards were higher. I can show you the newspaper... I have it here... I can show it as testimony evidence, which it was supposed to be distributed among the population, not only for the dissidents, as I said before, to distribute it among the population, and there you could see how the US Interests Section, precisely, was helping the internal opposition groups.

Then, some people who were working and others who were unemployed saw this as a form of escape: "Well, if I join this human rights group, they'll send me money and I'll live more comfortably, I'll have things that other people don't have, I can have more things than a doctor or a teacher or an intellectual," because the standard of living of many of us was completely different at that time than a doctor or an accredited journalist here.

Prosecutor: Witness, Odilia Collazo Valdés, are you really a dissident? Are you only and exclusively the President of the Cuban Party for Human Rights?

Odilia Collazo: Well, I'm really not a dissident. Today, I have the privilege of telling you that I am one of the persons selected by the government of Cuba, by the Interior Ministry; precisely today, I can openly show everyone that I am an agent, Agent Tania (laughter).

Felipe Pérez: What are you laughing at, Anita? (Referring to Anita Snow, Bureau Chief of the U.S. press agency Associated Press). Why are you laughing so?

I think you might help us tell Mr. Cason that he should consider the task that he has undertaken, he should evaluate it; he should know that ten U.S. presidents and 20 CIA directors have come and gone.

He should be advised that no one in Cuba is a fool, that we have only revealed a small part of what we know; he should know that and he must realize that our people have learned to defend themselves and depend on the people because we have, more than anything, the support of the people; because we have the legitimacy that comes out of the transparency of our actions and service to the common well-being. He should know that there are no stupid people here, and that while he got here only a short time ago, he has to consider the task he has undertaken; or we will have to continue organizing his meetings and attending the cocktail parties he throws (laughter).

Finally, as it is apparent, our legitimate decision to defend ourselves, using our laws and our legal institutions, has generated reactions.

We witnessed, first, that on March 26, the White House issued a declaration when President Bush returned to the McDill Air Force Base in Tampa, in which he called on the Cuban government not to exercise its sovereignty; a hasty declaration that can only be understood as an evident gesture by President Bush toward the right-wing Cuban-American mafia in Miami, who were there in Tampa helping him to explain the war that no one understands and, apparently, made this gesture to respond to the wishes of the extreme right-wing Cuban-American community in Miami, issuing this declaration.

Later, the deputy spokesman of the State Department, Mr. Phillip Reecker, distributed a written statement describing the measures, the arrests made in Cuba, where it says, for example: "The United States calls on the international community to join with us in condemning this crackdown and to demand the release of these Cuban prisoners of conscience."

Mr. Reecker should know that the international community is really horrified at the war that his government has unleashed without any type of international authorization, against world public opinion, with enormous material damage, the deaths of civilians; and is also horrified by the more than 600 prisoners who are still locked up at the Guantánamo Naval Base, in a juridical limbo, who are not treated as persons and will be presented in secret U.S. military courts. He could include the accused having no access to a defense or documents that have been declared secret information. He must surely know that this is what has shocked the international community, and the more than 2 000 prisoners that are still being held in U.S. jails and not even their names are yet known, despite the many actions that civil society has protested as the creation of a parallel system of justice in the United States, where the accused are considered to be dangerous to national security, and there has been an extraordinary increase in measures of this kind.

Mr. Reecker should know that we are also concerned and that the government of the United States is the least qualified in the world to judge what has happened in Cuba. If there

is any government that should be ashamed of saying anything, it is the government of the United States.

The Washington Post, in its December 1, 2002 edition, said that the Administration of President Bush has developed, and I quote: "a parallel legal system to investigate, incarcerate, interrogate, condemn and punish suspects, including U.S. citizens." This has not taken place in Cuba, and we haven't issued a decree creating special military tribunals, which are secret and summary. We don't have such courts here.

"The procedures include indefinite military detention, authorized by the President. Authorization to record communications and forced entry into installations. Trials carried out by military commissions and deportation orders following secret hearings." This is The Washington Post.

An editorial in the December 27, 2002 edition of The Washington Post expresses opposition to the CIA "using torture and violence in their interrogations," and suggests that "these new tactics in the war against terrorism are being developed secretly."

It wasn't by chance that the United States was excluded from the Human Rights Commission, to which it was only able to return, as I have already said, with the help of Italy and Spain, who withdrew their candidacy so that the United States could come back without having to take it to a vote.

Mr. Reecker should know that it was made known around the world on April 6, 2003 that there were more than two million prisoners in the United States as of the end of June 2002; the first time in history that the United States reached this figure. I think there are major concerns and issues in the U.S. that need to be addressed, that should concern, really, the deputy spokesman of the State Department, before judging the actions that we have taken in self-defense.

Here is a cable about Mr. Cason in Miami. Mr. Cason, it seems, divides his time between Havana and Miami. He was in Miami yesterday. When asked his opinion about the accusations by Cuban authorities, that he is dedicated to conspiracies in Cuba, this cable from the France Press News Agency reports he responded: "Mentira!" "A Lie!" which he, Cason, said in Spanish.

Mr. Cason surely must know the fable of Pinocchio, that "when you tell a lie, your nose grows."

He also said, and this is very interesting, he said: "the arrests and indictments were coldly calculated to take place while the world's attention was concentrated somewhere else." One can't be sure what he was referring to when he used the discreet phrase "somewhere else;" apparently he didn't have the courage to say "while the war is going on in Iraq;" which is what he thought, so he avoided it and said: "while the world's attention was concentrated somewhere else," the Cubans have taken advantage of this.

I strongly reject this. I have proven here that the arrests and the decision to apply the Law came about before the war began, before the terrorist actions against planes and Cuban boats began. This has been completely proven here.

On the other hand, there have been statements by the European Union that were certainly missing when five Cubans were unjustly condemned in rigged trials in a Miami courtroom. At that time, the European Union did not express any concern. Nor have we seen the European Union voice any apprehension about the situation that is taking place at the Guantánamo Naval Base. And we also see that they have not been able to maintain unity and express a position against the war on Iraq, which clearly violates international law.

We recall that the European Union reached an understanding with the United States on the application of the Helms-Burton Law, which is what we are fighting and confronting now in Cuba, a text that is really embarrassing. And we know quite well that the European Union has not had the ability to project an independent position towards Cuba, and this explains its lukewarm reaction to the blockade against Cuba; it explains its alliance with the U.S. position against Cuba in Geneva; it explains the fact that they have not been able to put together a European position on Cuba, one that defends international law, that defends the right of our people to independence and sovereignty; that they have not demanded respect for Cuba, which is a country with European ancestry. This is the reality. As a result, I can't be anything but surprised by this.

I find it amazing that the European Union, precisely at this moment, is concerned about Cuba and does not provide an ethical and moral lesson to the world by opposing the violation of international law. The European Union has not said one word about the more than 2,000 prisoners in U.S. jails, whose names have not even been revealed. So, we have every reason to have reservations about the European Union declaration.

It has been said that this situation could make it difficult for Cuba to enter the Cotonú Agreement and that the European Union would now have to re-evaluate...well, some in the European Union, because we don't look at it as a block, the European Union cannot be considered as a block, as we know, it is not a block; there are different tendencies, factions, and there are certain countries whose point of reference is somewhere other than in the European construction.

There has been talk and speculation that, well, "this will put Cuba's entry into the Cotonú Agreement in jeopardy and that this will, therefore, force us to maintain the Common Position". On this point we should recall that Cuba once withdrew its request to join the Cotonú Agreement and that if it has to do so again, it will.

Our country cannot be blackmailed or pressured. Our country has resisted the blockade of the world's leading super power and has not bbent down, so there is no reason why it should bend now to the pressures of another international player.

Remember, too, that Cuba did not apply for admission to the Cotonú Agreement thinking either of money or European assistance, but at the request of the Caribbean nations that asked us to join the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of countries, recalling the support we have received from African, Asian and Caribbean nations that are members of the Agreement. Since we were given observer status we have maintained a position of solidarity and responded to their interests, and for this reason we requested admission. But no one should believe that anyone here has lost any sleep, or that we spend our time thinking and trying to find out how people over there view us, rather than look at the weather reports.

Taking all things into account and keeping our countenance we can assure you from now that our position is clear and firm. Although others might not defend their sovereignty, we do as it has cost us dearly. We know its price and we are not willing to relinquish it.

I also know that there have been statements made by the Spanish Foreign Minister who declared publicly on February 20 in Madrid ... (INTERUPTION IN THE TRANSMISSION)...This is probably an action of the US Interests Sextion (laughter).

As I was saying, on February 20 some rather strange statements on Cuba by the Spanish Foreign Minister were published. She referred to the "deep differences we maintain with Cuba" and the "lack of commitment on the part of Cuban authorities to move forward in the democratization of the regime and respect for human rights".

I think that if there is any government in the world that should not be talking about democracy, it's the Spanish government, which has been supporting a war that is opposed by 91% of Spaniards. Almost all Spaniards are opposed to the war. They elected the government. Presumably, the government should operate based on what the governed think. That's what we do and that's why they have not been able to defeat us with blockades and aggressions.

I imagine that I should respond to the Minister expressing our sympathies for yesterday's deaths in Baghdad of two Spanish journalists. We regret what has occurred and wish to extend our sympathies to the Minister, the Spanish government, and the people of Spain for the death of these two journalists in a war the Spanish government has unconditionally supported.

Well, I had my doubts about whether to comment on the statements by the Spanish Minister of Education, Culture, and Sports, Mrs. Pilar del Castillo. She said that "most Cuban intellectuals are in prison". Let me see when she said this, it was April 6. She said that we "have taken advantage of the war to turn the screws on intellectuals". I haven't heard that the Cuban Writers and Artists Union has complained about our "turning the screws" on them here, in fact, quite the opposite is true, and these are the "people tied to the world of culture". The Minister should know that we have acted against people tied to the U.S. Interests Section and the U.S. special services, and not to culture.

So, we have a hysterical reaction that shows total ignorance of what happens in Cuba. I don't know, the Spanish Minister of Culture is all of a sudden in the media, and has made strident declarations about Cuba. The reasons behind this are unclear.

I also don't know if the Minister is aware of the battle that we Cubans have had to wage for more than a century for our independence and human rights, following the talks in Paris in which Spain handed Cuba over to the United States. I don't know if she is aware of this. I only know that I have seen these strange declarations.

Finally, I would like to comment here on the statement issued by the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, who says that "the information we have received concerning the arrests is alarming". I don't know why Mr. Matsuura is particularly alarmed in the case of Cuba when no one has seen him alarmed about the prisoners in Guantánamo, the prisoners in the United States, the excesses of the war in Iraq, the death of children and the civilian population. No one has seen him alarmed and declaring that an aggression and violation of international law have taken place. No one has seen him do so. I don't know why all of a sudden he's become alarmed specifically over Cuba. He says that he has received information, that his advisors have explained it to him.

He says that "promoting the free circulation of ideas through words and images are part of UNESCO's Constitution". We are well aware of this and have defended the exercise of these rights for more than 100 Third World peoples who belong to UNESCO and on whom they are trying to impose a new cultural model eliminating the right to enjoy their native cultures. So we have been waging this battle a long time before Mr. Matsuura arrived on the scene and assumed the post of Director General. It seems to me, speaking of the free circulation of ideas, that this could also hold true for the biased coverage of the war by the international media. This has been a disgraceful spectacle that has moved broad intellectual sectors and public opinion across the world, but about which Mr. Matsuura has not said a word.

He says that 'according to information we have received, the accused had no right to a proper legal defense". I don't know who gave him this information that he says he received. Now that the United States has decided to return to UNESCO, I don't know if it was the new U.S. representative there, but the effect of their presence is evident.

He says that "we have urgently called on the Cuban authorities to respect...". We urgently ask Mr. Matsuura to attend to his mandate, to deal with the more than 800 million people in the world that don't know how to read or write and that are an essential part of the work of this specialized UN agency. I am very surprised by the statement although I can imagine his motives and objectives.

So this is what I wanted to, briefly, (laughter) inform you about, although I feel very encouraged to see that you have all maintained great interest. In any event, if there are any questions I am willing to take them.

Moderator: If there are any questions, I would like to ask you to use the microphone, identify yourself, and your media outlet.

Mr. Medem (TVE): My question has to do with the reference you made to Carlos Alberto Montaner's letter, which, if I recall correctly, was addressed to Osvaldo Alonso in which he mentioned certain ties of high-level Spanish officials in relation to, if I heard correctly, the Varela Project.

I would like to ask if, on the part of the Cuban Government, whether in the course of these trials any information has been discovered that has not been published and that would explain a little what has been the development of the Varela Project and if this is included in the definition of complicity with U.S. aggression against the Revolution, the Government, and the People of Cuba.

Felipe Pérez: Yes, it is included, and yes, we have information that at the right moment we will make public. No, we don't know anything more of the letter. I think that more could be asked from Mr. Carlos Alberto Montaner who must know the names of the officials who he referred to in the letter that I read.

The Varela Project is part of a strategy of subversion against Cuba that has been conceived, financed, and directed from abroad with the active participation of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. It is part of the same subversive design and has no basis whatsoever in Cuban law. It is a crude manipulation of Cuba's laws and Constitution. The time will come to delve into this more thoroughly.

Vanesa Bauzá (Sun Sentinel): There have been rumors that it is possible that the Cuban government will offer the exile to some of the people who were tried last week instead of serving their sentences here in Cuba. Could you deny or say something about this?

Felipe Pérez: I indeed deny that the Cuban Government is thinking about this. In addition, there are institutions in Cuba, the courts, that adopt decisions. The government cannot overrule the court decisions. The rule of law is in effect here, Vanesa.

Vanesa Bauzá: We have also heard the President say that Cuba could do without the U.S. Interests Section. Is there a real possibility of closing the U.S. Interests Section or your Interests Section in Washington?

Felipe Pérez: Well, we know that is the hope, the golden dream of those who sustain the blockade and the aggressive policy against Cuba. Perhaps this is also the dream of Mr. Cason, his heroic return, expelled from Cuba.

We know who would celebrate and be overjoyed by such a decision, but in any event closing the Interests Section in Havana and asking Cason to leave the country is a right that we reserve ourselves.

Gerardo Arreola (La Jornada): Minister, the Mexican Foreign Minister Derbez, has also made comments on the trials that you referred to and on Mexico's possible vote in the Human Rights Commission. Do you have any comment?

Felipe Pérez: Foreign Minister Derbez was with Minister Ana Palacio of Spain in Madrid, and the news agencies reported that he said: "We are undoubtedly concerned over the recent events in that country. The issue was analyzed by the two delegations and will certainly have an impact and will be evaluated by the government before the meeting of the Human Rights Commission."

I think that Foreign Minister Derbez, has tried to offer an advance explanation, in a relatively careful fashion although that does not hide the fact that he is referring to the internal affairs of another country, of what we know will surely be Mexico's position when the votes are cast at the Human Rights Commission on April 16, which will be a vote in favor of the resolution against Cuba.

We know that this will be the case because we understand that the Mexican government does not have room to do anything different and we think that this declaration somewhat prepares the way for what is for us a "Chronicle of a Vote Foretold" (play on Gabriel Garcia's book)

Gerardo Arreola: Excuse me, if I could ask Minister if you feel this will affect bilateral relations?

Felipe Pérez: I don't want to second guess this. I have a lot of things that remain to offer an opinion on. I don't want to get ahead of myself. This does not mean that I won't offer an opinion at some point, but for the time being I have said enough.

Fernando Rausberg (BBC): Minister, the day before the trials began, the five Cuban prisoners in the United States were removed from their punishment cells. Did the jailing have any relation with the situation of these five Cubans in the United States? Would it be possible at some point to negotiate?

Felipe Pérez: Such an idea has not even crossed our minds. In Cuba, no one has even thought of the possibility of negotiating the situation of those accused and sentenced in Cuban courts in recent days with the five Cubans unjustly sentenced in the United States. No one here has even thought of this.

It should be noted that there are differences. They are innocent. They were fighting against terrorism. They were judged without due process in a trial that was manipulated, which became a kangaroo trial dominated by groups of the Cuban extreme right. They were denied basic guarantees such as access to their lawyers. It should be noted that they faced a trial following 17 months of imprisonment in punishment cells in which they were not able to prepare their defense. It should also be noted that they were once again jailed (in such cells) to prevent them from participating in their lawyers' preparation of the appeals to the Atlanta court.

There are deep differences in the motivation and moral quality and the circumstances of the crime charged here with those alleged crimes there, as well as the conditions of the trials. In any event, there is not the slightest idea of doing any such thing.

Moderator: Any other questions? I don't see any more questions. Minister, we thank you for your presentation.

Felipe Pérez: Thank you for your presence here today. (applause)

New York, April 11, 2003